

S. 2231 Medical Evaluation Parity for Servicemembers (MEPS) Act

Mental health issues are a persistent problem affecting thousands of servicemembers and veterans, and their families. While the Department of Defense has made significant strides in improving the way it handles mental health issues, important gaps remain. Strengthening the military's ability to identify, assess, and track servicemembers suffering from mental health conditions is a key step towards more effective and comprehensive mental health care. While members of the Armed Forces currently undergo a series of extensive physical assessments, they do not undergo comparable mental health assessments.

To correct this imbalance, Senators Portman and Rockefeller introduced the MEPS Act. The House of Representatives has companion MEPS Act legislation led by Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson (PA-05) and Rep. Tim Ryan (OH-13). The goal of the legislation is to ensure that DoD implements policies that comprehensively address the need for better mental health screening for servicemembers from start to finish. It also seeks to remove some of the barriers to effective care. Specifically, the MEPS Act:

1. Requires a mental health screening to accompany the physical screening already given to all new recruits at Medical Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS). The results of these screenings will be used to establish a baseline for subsequent mental health assessments.
2. Requires mandatory mental health screenings as part of the Separation Health Assessment (SHA) servicemembers receive when leaving active duty. This would provide more accurate information on their mental health condition as they transition to civilian life.
3. Requires a report on DoD's ability to provide each servicemember with an electronic copy of his medical records. Providing each servicemember with electronic health records would make the transition from military to non-military health care easier.

CBO estimates that the entry screening requirement will have no budgetary affect, while funding for exit screenings and the report on electronic medical records uses previously authorized funding for military health care.

Caring for servicemembers suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and other conditions requires better screening and monitoring of those affected. The MEPS Act will promote a more comprehensive and holistic approach to mental health assessments in the military and remove some of the barriers to effective care.

The MEPS Act has the support of 40 Veterans' organizations and health advocacy groups.